

CRUISE LINES TO RESUME OPERATIONS - FOR VACCINATED PASSENGERS ONLY



Last week, the United States authorized the cruise industry to carry out test voyages with volunteer passengers as a way to speed up a possible revival by mid-July.

According to the health authorities, **if cruise lines can guarantee that the vast majority of the crew (98%) and passengers (95%) are fully vaccinated, they may be able to resume operations after more than a year.**

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) updated its Conditional Sailing Ordinance (CSO) issued by the federal entity last October, which provides a framework for conducting these test trips.

Among the instructions are procedures to help cruise lines reduce the risk of transmitting or spreading COVID-19, according to the CDC statement. It includes requirements and recommendations on prevention measures, monitoring of COVID-19 on board, laboratory tests, infection prevention and control, use of face masks, social distancing, interaction with passengers, as well as boarding experiences and procedures, and disembarkation.

With the updated guidelines, cruise lines now have all the necessary requirements to begin 'simulated' trips before resuming regular passenger trips, the CDC wrote.

In addition, this new version includes the request for the navigation certificate, as outlined on the CSO, which is the final step before starting passenger trips.

The CDC will update documents online to add changes to quarantine procedures and lessons learned from the test trips, among other recommendations.

Eyes on July

Previously, the CDC explained in a letter to cruise lines that they would be able to skip the test voyages requirement if most of the crew and passengers are vaccinated.

With the announcement, the cruise industry saw the possibility of resuming operations from U.S. ports in July, with all sailing activities suspended since March 2020 due to COVID-19; but now health authorities have announced a relaxation from these sailing restrictions.

Since last April 12, the CDC and senior executives of other relevant federal agencies have participated in meetings twice a week with representatives of various cruise lines, the statement details. The goals of these meetings have been to discuss and exchange information on the impact of vaccines and other scientific advances since the CSO was issued.

At least two ships of Royal Caribbean cruise line have made stops in Miami to vaccinate crew members, the company announced last week.

“It is going to be extremely important that our crew are vaccinated,” said Michael Bayley, Royal Caribbean International CEO.

Last March, the Cruise Lines International Association (CLIA), which represents 95% of companies with global cruise capacity, urged the CDC to lift the restriction and allow planning for a gradual reopening of cruise operations starting next July.

The CLIA noted that July is in line with the Biden administration’s forecast of when the United States will be “closer to normal.”

In early April, the CDC updated the pandemic measures for cruises from U.S. ports, but maintained its travel recommendation to the population to avoid going on a cruise for pleasure.

According to the CLIA, between March and September 2020, the industry recorded losses of USD 77 billion in global economic activity, losing 518,000 jobs equivalent to 23 billion in wages.

In Miami-Dade County alone, the cruise industry generates about 7 billion a year, employing about 40,000 people directly and indirectly, as well as supporting other industries of the economy.

Cruise lines resuming operations and requiring passengers to be fully vaccinated before they board include:

Celebrity Cruises: The cruise line plans to return to Europe and the Caribbean in June.

Crystal Cruises: Crystal plans to start its river cruises in May and ocean sailings in June.

Lindblad Expeditions: Lindblad's requirements include proof of COVID vaccination for guests age 16 and up; two negative COVID-19 tests prior to boarding (one before leaving home, and a rapid test administered by ship staff at embarkation); and that you self-isolate at home and follow CDC guidelines for five days prior to leaving home. Expedition cruises to Alaska and the Galapagos will start in June.

Norwegian Cruise Line: The initial sailings will operate at 60 percent capacity, and will be ramped up by 20 percent every 30 days.

Oceania Cruises/ Regent Seven Seas Cruises: The cruise line will also require all adult passengers and crew members to be fully vaccinated.

Royal Caribbean: The cruise line will resume operations in Mexico and the Caribbean in June.

Virgin Voyages: The line is scheduled to launch this July.

Windstar Cruises: Windstar will return to the Caribbean and Mediterranean this June at reduced capacity.

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